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ABSTRACT

Since 1989, professional growth seminars at St. Norbert College (Wisconsin) have brought cooperating teachers together to share their thoughts and emotions related to the experience of student teacher mentoring. In these seminars, the mentors gather for mutual instruction and support. Each seminar series consists of six 2-hour meetings during a 16-week semester. Each mentor supervises a student teacher during seminar participation and keeps a journal of personal reflections on the experience. The seminar aims to elicit in-depth discussion about effective student teacher guidance. Seminar facilitators guide cooperating teachers through Rogerian-based reflective dialogue sessions, with frequent reference to the experiential journals. Use of Rogerian principles that involve self-disclosure and empathic listening during the intimate dialogue sessions help participants not only to become better mentors, but also to become more "self-actualized" and "fully functioning." Presented are excerpts from participants' journals that discuss the qualities of successful student teachers, the student teacher-cooperating teacher relationship, mentor stress, student teacher evaluation, and the mutual support and other benefits derived from the seminar. (SV)

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SELF-ENHANCING SEMINARS AND EXPERIENTIAL JOURNALS FOR COOPERATING TEACHERS: A PROFESSIONAL GROWTH MODEL

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Abstract
Since 1989, "Mentor Growth Seminars," have been conducted by St. Norbert College Teacher Education Professionals. College and community collaboration goals include generating research and practice models of effective student teacher mentoring. Seminars follow Rogerian and Glasser related meeting and dialogue models.

During a presentation of ideas contained in this paper at the American Association of Teacher Educators Conference at Williamsburgh, one teacher educator from a university program indicated that, contrary to the humanistic and personal communication approaches between college supervisors and cooperating teacher mentors emphasized in our presentation, their professors and supervisors had withdrawn from face-to-face dialogues and were conducting almost all college supervisor-to-cooperating teacher communication exchanges by way of e-mail. Use of e-mail messages should not be bashed and their efficiency with brief reciprocal and informational exchanges seems self-evident. But for purposes of extended and in-depth communications where mutually bonded field and college located mentors can come together at a single location to share thoughts and emotions, e-mail seems critically inadequate. Gathering at a specific location for a two-hour period sets the stage for such dialogue sharing and mutual helping.

Our seminars for cooperating teachers described in these pages emphasize the gathering of student teacher mentors at a specific location for reasons that go far beyond what sending and receiving e-mail memos can accomplish. The Specific mentoring goals are discussed and special reference is made to the "cognitive apprenticeship" that mentors offer to student teachers (Kagan and Warren, 1992). Components of cognitive apprenticeship are:

1) Modeling or when the mentor teaches effectively while the mentoree observes and builds conceptual models.
2) Coaching or when the mentor observes the mentoree and offers feedback.
3) Scaffolding or when the mentor supports increasingly competent performances by the mentoree and injects cues/questions to highlight that effective action.
4) Articulation or when the mentor requires the mentoree to verbalize about teaching values and actions.
5) Reflection or when the mentor encourages the mentoree to "replay" performances and devise other outcomes, better or worse, than what occurred.
6) Exploration or when the mentor encourages the mentoree to become more resourceful and imaginative.

From fall of 1989 through fall of 1995, eight groups of cooperating teachers, referred to as mentors, recorded personal reflections in journals while student teachers served in their classrooms. The total number of mentor participants was 63. The journals were assigned as part of a seminar series titled "Professional Growth Seminars" (PGS) that were cooperatively designed by Jerald Hauser, a Teacher Education Professor from St. Norbert College, and Carolyn Kleinfeldt, a State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Licensing Bureau Chief. The seminars continue at St. Norbert College with the facilitation of Jerald Hauser and Debra Faase. Successful completion of a seminar series earned 90 clock hours and state approved cooperating teacher certification. Each seminar participant supervised a student teacher during the seminar participation. This made the journals and seminar dialogues more

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immediate and reality-based. Journal entries were discussed among mentors at the seminars guided by various college program professors and staff. Seminars convened at the St. Norbert College campus six times each semester from 4:00-6:00 p.m.

The Self-Enhancing Seminars Model

Seminar goals are intended to solicit in-depth discussion about effective student teacher guidance. Seminar facilitators guided cooperating teachers through Rogerian-based dialogue sessions and frequent experiential journaling. Use of reflective dialogue practices developed by Carl Rogers (1961) is a crucial influence in the Professional Growth Seminars. An idealized outcome for the seminar program founders is that cooperating teachers will begin to feel that their work with student teachers is more than a service rendered to a local college teacher certification program. That cooperating teachers come to view their personal and professional growth as being enhanced through the process of guiding student teachers is a unique goal of the seminars. Use of Rogerian principles in intimate dialogue sessions hopefully helps cooperating teachers become more than very good mentors. Additionally cooperating teachers should become more "self-actualized" and "fully functioning"(Rogers, C., 1961). Use of Rogerian principles that involve self-disclosure and empathic listening during the intimate dialogue sessions hopefully assist cooperating teachers in becoming excellent mentors and more fully-functioning individuals. It is our hope that these seminars facilitate mentor reflectiveness and every effort is made to offer a setting that encourages such an outcome. For, as certain authors indicate, "Clearly it is difficult to develop a reflective teacher in a nonreflective environment." (Martin, Wedman, Mahlios, 1990)

Through participation in Rogerian dialogues and maintenance of individual journals, mentors become empowered with effective communication vehicles for expressing their doubts, joys, stresses, hesitations, disappointments, and other states related to guiding student teachers. This report is a distillation of such mentor cognitive and affective states derived from a composite of seminar dialogues and journal meditations. Of additional importance is that this paper is one of our primary seminar resources. At the beginning of each seminar series copies of this paper are received by each of the participants. We've found that the array of mentoring issues contained in paragraphs and quotes make excellent personal reflection and dialogue stimulators.

Strong Student Teachers and Their Mentors

When exploring qualities of successful student teachers, seminar mentors cited the importance of college screening - the earlier the better. Modeling and communication skills of mentors were also cited as important competence factors. One journalist described feelings of alarm on learning that her student teacher came from a "family of teachers" who depended more on improvisation than careful planning.

"I wanted to jump on my soapbox and start preaching that plans are goals, plans are charts in a sea of learning... I will try to share some of these thoughts with her, but under no circumstances do I want to find myself criticizing her mother or others who share ideas and methods with her."

Specific journal entries about what strong student teachers should arrive with or develop very quickly include: ability to cope with stress... strong verbal/oral communication skills... sensitive parent conferencing skills... ability to work with small and large student groups... ability to recognize and analyze specific learning and thinking styles of students... ability to teach to those recognized styles... rapport skills and talent for making classroom conditions comfortable... confident knowledge of educational technologies... understanding of management and motivation principles and techniques... alertness to Exceptional Education conditions and regulations... and awareness of effective assessment practices.

Strong mentoring was described in one journal as guidance that helped student teachers "...piece together their talent..." Helping student teachers convert theories into workable practices was portrayed in several journals as a daunting challenge. Appreciations for strong student teachers were expressed in various journals. Delight in student teacher competence was a frequent journal topic, but the fact that strong student teachers can produce mentor stress was also described. Certain journals were confessional in

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concern about feeling a loss of role and even temporary loss of mentor self-confidence. One mentor made the following journal entry:

"Today was my day to take back my reading class. I found myself actually feeling nervous with my student teacher observing me. This was the first time since she was in my classroom that her presence made me nervous. I suppose it is because I saw her do such a fine job with the reading class that I was somehow worried about how she would 'evaluate' my presentation."

Another mentor expressed stress even more candidly:

"Because she (student teacher) is so young and attractive, students' manner with her is very different. The student who had the most trouble with me last year just beams when she talks to him and almost went into coronary arrest today when she called him by his football nickname. I think it is a level of caring that I have not given. Although the student teacher is unconvinced of my theory, I believe that this is what is happening."

The Assessment Dance and Mentor Frustrations

Need to evaluate student teacher competence is valued though not necessarily enjoyed by mentors. The metaphor of student teaching as resembling "living in a fish bowl" seems appropriate. Mentors continually assess their protégés in various informal ways. But having to observe and assess student teachers in objective capacities, while striving for continued bonds of partnership, is a significant challenge.

The intimate proximity that student teachers and mentors exercise, and how that influences mentor assessments, merits careful attention. In this professional context, two unique persons, often in a single classroom, must learn to cooperate daily. The classroom, with its demands for thousands of weekly decisions, is complex enough for one professional to manage. But for three persons, in a kind of "assessment dance," the sense of comfortable partnership cannot be assumed. Various journal entries describe many discomforts related to misunderstandings about routines, regulations, student behaviors, communications, peer interpretations, college supervisor interpretations, and building administrator desires. The working together of mentor and student teacher, often in close quarters, can intensify conflict situations. One specific situation deteriorated almost from day one. An early journal entry begins:

"Irritations continue. The student teacher is doing little things that bother me like pulling the overhead screen down and leaving it there all day. The untidy room is still a pet peeve. I told her to feel free to move things in the room, but I wish when she took something down, like the grading scale, that she just wouldn't leave it sit on the floor. I'm neat and orderly, and I'm having a hard time with the fact that she isn't."

Another case involved escalating frustration of a gifted teacher mentoring a faltering student teacher. Various journal entries describe many mentor efforts to reach the student teacher who seemed unable to perceive his at-risk situation with her. Salvation for both mentor and student teacher never occurred. One of the final journal entries begins:

"I've started to look at the evaluation (form) and I just don't know what to write. I have to be honest, but I would die if I was getting the kind of recommendation that I am going to have to write for him. It is so sad. I just pray that God has a plan in mind for him."

In a third case, a mentor described assessment misunderstandings that occurred between her and the student teacher.

"I had listed 5 positive areas about her learning centers, then mentioned as a weakness that activity changes caused confusion. She was put out about it. Another concern I expressed was that she walks

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around the room and clicks her pen constantly. Today I was only in the room about 10 minutes. I know she doesn't want me there. She doesn't want to change anything. She feels things are going just fine. I then asked her if she was perfect. Cruel, I know, but I wanted her to think a little."

Also important as a counter-balance to the above dissatisfactions is the cooperating teacher who, in one of her journal entries, expressed worry that her student teacher was driving herself too hard and becoming discouraged. This mentor wrote:

"I feel guilty only because I know how overwhelmed teachers get, including myself. We put more and more energy into our jobs to prove ourselves at the expense of our own well-being. I want my student teacher to know that she also needs to take care of herself in order to be a good teacher and prevent burnout. She must allow herself to be less than perfect. A lesson many of us in the profession are learning too late."

Every college supervisor should realize that evaluation anxieties are keenly felt by mentors and student teachers. The roles of manager and subordinate cannot be forgotten or concealed from either partner in this close quartered assessment dance. They are ubiquitous in the daily lives of mentors and student teachers.

Seminar Bonding and Support

Complimentary references to the mentor self-reflection seminars with their journaling, self-disclosure, and critical thinking outcomes are not solicited, but do occur and their presence helps assure the seminar leader that dialogue and journal outcomes are efficacious learning opportunities for all participants. A common result of every seminar group is the feeling of increased solidarity that grows among mentors. A sense of bonding and mutual support has always become strong by the time the final two or three seminars occur. An important participant in this intimate process is the college supervisors who facilitate the seminars. Typical final judgments, expressed in journals, as to the seminar values include the following:

1) Less experienced mentors learn significant skills from dialogue with more experienced mentors.
2) Mentors can listen to and mutually support each other.
3) Because seminar mentors are guiding student teachers during the seminar's semester, opportunities to discuss student teacher guidance and specific incident cases are very spontaneous and sincerely felt.
4) Critical thinking from the journal writing is very high.
5) The seminars help mentors feel better about themselves and the work they do with student teachers.

Two typical and recent compliments from a journal by a mentoror are:

"Our discussion at seminar last night was really good for me. I felt very supported. It was great to have others who would listen and give suggestions. It made me rethink the situation and feel more positive. It also helped to learn that Deb (the supervisor) had some of the concerns that I had."

"Our seminar classes gave me a chance to share my frustration with others and also realize that I'm not alone. Coming to seminar gave me a boost that I can help a student teacher become an effective teacher. We are all learning and developing no matter where we are in our careers."

Summation and Final Perspectives

In these seminars, cooperating teachers, referred to as mentors, gather for mutual instruction and support. Each seminar series consisted of six two-hour meetings distributed over a semester of 16 weeks. Seminar goals include mentor reflection, dialogue, and journaling about mentor and mentoree activities. Among the most valuable seminar results are mentors' recommendations about needed skills for effective student teacher guidance and their additional insights about various conditions important in the mentor and student teacher complex, some of which may not be readily apparent to "outsiders."

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Much was gained for future thought and applications from these mentor gatherings. Such seminars where small groups of active mentors meet for dialogue and the sharing of journal reflections seems superior to more traditional college courses open to larger and more eclectic enrollments. Mentors should gain a dialogue venue that respects their personal thoughts and voices. They can attend such seminar sessions knowing that what they say and write matters. In accordance with much recent emphasis on programs that encourage reflective student teachers (Wedman, Martin, and Mahlios, 1990), the self-enhancing seminars emphasize inquiry and reflectivity among mentors of student teachers. Hopefully such seminars advance or reaffirm convictions that student teacher guidance matters tremendously. Hopefully the seminar insights, derived from and shared through advanced seminar conversations, help all participants to feel renewed and confident.

As a final postscript, we think it's important to indicate that another set of professional growth seminars is now in session at St. Norbert College in the Fall of 1996.

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Biographies

Jerald Hauser is a professor in the Education Discipline at St. Norbert College. He is a co-founder of the St. Norbert Professional Growth Seminars.

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